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Spy Tells How U.S. Data Aided Red Rocket Plans

By Ted Sell
The Los Angeles Times

During the 1950s and early 1960s Soviet espionage agents obtained United States data that helped Russia short-cut its weapons development, according to Col. Stig Eric Wennerstroem, convicted by his native Sweden as a Soviet spy.

Wennerstroem, 57, admitted he spied for the Soviet Union when he was a Swedish air attache in Washington from 1952 to 1957, and after he returned to his own country as an air defense staff officer from 1957 until his arrest in 1963. He was sentenced last June to life imprisonment.

Wennerstroem's revelations led to extensive changes in Sweden's defense arrangements.

In testimony made available by the Swedish government to the Senate Subcommittee on Internal Security, Wennerstroem said he spied on the Russians for German friends during an earlier tour in Moscow in 1941-43 and was a double agent, providing information to both the United States and Russia, during his 1949-52 Moscow assignment.

Testimony Released

The Subcommittee released the testimony yesterday.

Gradually, Wennerstroem said, his sympathies shifted to the Soviet Union because he felt Russian strategic plans were defensive in nature while the United States planned offensive war.

Wennerstroem said the Russians eventually gave him the rank of major general in the Soviet spy apparatus because of data he gathered during the Korean War on U. S. and NATO war plans.

Wennerstroem said espionage information led the Russians to lag far behind the United States during the 1950s in most weapons in order to concentrate on development of nuclear warheads and rockets to achieve "a balance of power in the 1960s."

During the 1950s, Wennerstroem said, information from spies convinced Soviet planners that any U.S. or NATO effort against Russia would be primarily strategic bombing attacks without accompanying land war.

This permitted the Russians to accord high priority to anti-aircraft defense for the immediate threat and to concentrate on nuclear-armed rockets for the future.

Got Data Easily

During his time in Washington, Wennerstroem told Swedish interrogators, he found no difficulty in gathering technical data normally denied foreigners.

One of his most fruitful sources, he said, was U.S. defense industry.

As air attache, Wennerstroem also headed a mission which purchased defense materiel for Swedish forces.

Wennerstroem said he "fostered relations with the highest chiefs so that I became known among them" and lower officials who knew of this relationship were cooperative as a result.

Sometimes when visiting U.S. industrial plants, Wennerstroem related, he was asked if he had appropriate security clearance. He usually replied affirmatively and was rarely challenged, he said.

When he came to Washington, after having been in Russia, he said he was specifically told by the Russians to avoid "normal" military intelligence such as personnel assignments and military strength reports, in order to concentrate on sending technical data to Russia.

He was told by a Russian general to whom he reported that there was no need for other data because the Russians had better contacts for it than he, Wennerstroem said.

Biological Warfare Hinted

Data he gathered indicated to the Russians that the United States was planning biological warfare against grain fields in the Ukraine and the Kuban district of Southern Russia — breadbasket of the Soviet Union — he said. But the Russians told him they were not interested in U. S. biological-warfare information because "they were far ahead in these fields."

Wennerstroem said he passed information both in Washington and Moscow to his Russian "contacts" through innocent-appearing handshakes at large gatherings, sometimes "under the noses of high-ranking American officers."

Sometimes intelligence information was passed in the cloakroom at diplomatic parties.